

UNITED STATES  
 AIR FORCE  
 EUROPEAN THEATER OF OPERATIONS  
 2/V and X Detachment  
 Military Intelligence Service

W. E. REPORT NO. 259  
EVASION IN FRANCE

(Date)

Alfred J. ZEOLI S/Sgt, 31042353  
 (Rank) (Rank) (ASN)

(Squadron) (Company)  
349 25 100

BRANCH OF SERVICE: 24th SIG Regt -  
 HOME ADDRESS: 12 Rippled St - East Norwich Connecticut

TARGET: Rommel  
 MIA: 3 Sept -  
 Arrived in Spain: 20 Nov -  
 Arrived in ~~Spain~~ 2 Dec -  
 Arrived in UK: 10 Dec -

MEMBERS OF CREW: (When information checked with PW's)

	Official Disposition	Narrator Disposition
ENGINEER		
CO-PILOT		
NAVIGATOR	0-758320 2d Lt Charles B WINKELMAN	MIA
BOMBARDIER	0-801345 2d Lt Ralph D SMITH	<del>MIA</del> in rear cockpit
RADIO OPERATOR	0-800093 2d Lt William H BOOTH	MIA RPT
TOP TURRET GUNNER	0-676325 2d Lt Edward M HARRIS	MIA RPT Narrator
BALL TURRET GUNNER	37426256 T/Sgt Jean E RAY - P/W?	MIA
WHEEL GUINER	14134640 T/Sgt Thomas E COMBS	MIA <i>hid in woods + didn't let fuel</i>
WHEEL GUINER	32437605 S/Sgt Thomas L CUCCARO	MIA <i>P/W? caught before fuel in 2 words - had released at time</i>
TAIL GUNNER	31042353 S/Sgt Alfred J ZEOLI	NARRATOR
	32443852 S/Sgt Michael F DARBY	MIA RPT 167
	38220710 S/Sgt Emile M BANKHEAD	MIA

Were you wounded? yes; wrist wounds + hands - scars -

*Harris*  
*I*  
*On our way to the target at Romilly*

Damaged  
by FLAK

Two bursts of flak damaged the nose of our aircraft and one ~~struck~~ <sup>struck</sup> the left wing by the gas-tank. The left wing caught fire and part of it ~~was~~ flapping loosely. The alarm-bell, ~~to~~ <sup>to</sup> prepare to bale out, rang at the same time ~~it~~ <sup>it</sup> was announced over the inter-phone. Each man in the waist checked in and all was well there as far as injuries ~~were~~ <sup>were</sup> concerned.

Attacked by  
fighters

We fell ~~behind~~ <sup>behind</sup> the formation, under attack from fighters. The order to bale out was given then, and, as I left the plane the navigator was taking off his oxygen mask; the copilot had entered the nose and was ~~transferring his~~ <sup>transferring his</sup> ~~curse~~ <sup>curse</sup> from his cap to his pocket. ~~xxxxxx~~ <sup>I left</sup> the plane around 4000 feet - I judged the height from experience - and, after somersaulting for ~~xxxxxx~~ a few seconds, I straightened out on my back by putting my arms and legs together. Looking over my shoulder turned me into body-spins so I pulled the ripcord around 2000 feet. I thought I was being fired at from the ground, and, though I know nothing about manipulating a chute, I tried spilling the air to hurry my fall. There was little time to think about evasion before hitting the ground.

out at  
4000 feet

tries to hurry  
descent

Melun

I landed in a field near a small three-quarter acre wood in the vicinity of MELUN. There was a larger forest half a mile ~~xxxxxx~~ <sup>xxxxxx</sup> from the small wood. S-2 had always said that a small wood was less likely to ~~be~~ <sup>be</sup> ~~searched~~ <sup>searched</sup> as carefully as a larger wood, so when I had covered my chute with loose dirt, I ~~started for~~ <sup>started for</sup> the small wood. A Frenchman, working in the fields, stood about 200 yards away, watching me. At first I thought he might ~~offer~~ <sup>offer</sup> help me, but, he made no move, and the two children with him ran toward me, I waited no longer. The small wood, ~~was~~ <sup>was</sup> only fifty feet ~~away~~ <sup>away</sup> ~~from me~~ <sup>from me</sup> ~~so I was~~ <sup>so I was</sup> ~~out of~~ <sup>out of</sup> the farmer's sight in a few seconds. While running through the wood I stopped twice to hide my flying boots and other equipment. Near the opposite side ~~of the wood~~ I stopped when I found a shallow depression in the dirt, covered over the thick, ground vines. This was an excellent hiding place because the vine-leaves were the same color as my summer flying clothes.

Hides under  
ground vines

SEARCHERS ON  
SCENE IMMEDIATELY

About five minutes passed before there was a sound and <sup>then, hearing voice,</sup> ~~when~~ I raised my head to see if the ~~voices~~ ~~heard~~ were German or French; ~~two~~ two German soldiers walk<sup>ed</sup> through the wood, beating the underbrush. From other sounds I estimated that there were six to eight soldiers searching for me. This went on ~~for~~ several hours before they moved across the fields to the larger wood.

APPROXIMATELY  
FRIENDLY  
FARMER

I stayed <sup>under the vines</sup> ~~where I was hidden~~ from 0930 hours until 1900 hours. Then I went to the edge of the wood, cautiously, in case a sentry had been posted. A farmer - I think it was the same one who had seen me come down - was working alone in the fields. When he heard that I was an American parachutist he set his watch at 2100 hours, took me back to the wood, and, motioned me to hide until he returned.

GIVEN FOOD  
AND A COAT

At 2115 hours he brought food and was <sup>going</sup> ~~about~~ to leave me there, but, I held on to him until he understood that I was cold and wanting a place to sleep. Rather worriedly, he motioned that I could follow him. We went to a house in a small village, and, while I sat by the fire several people argued among themselves about what they could do with me. When the argument was over, the farmer fixed a package of food for me and took me to the street where he motioned that I must go on alone because he could not help. As a parting gift he gave me a coat, and, because his dejection was so much worse than mine I felt quite cheered, <sup>by comparison.</sup> I slept the rest of that night in a wheatstack on the outskirts of the village.

At <sup>3</sup> daybreak I ~~xxxxxxxxxxxx~~ walked south <sup>following</sup> ~~by~~ a compass course. MELUN, I knew, was the largest <sup>town</sup> ~~place~~ near me. During the next four hours I passed through three small towns and in one of them I stopped at a public fountain for water. There were plenty of people about, but, at no time did I notice any one paying unusu<sup>al</sup> attention to me. Late in the morning I walked by a crossroads cafe. Two men were standing in front of the cafe talking when I passed, ~~and~~, I saw them turn to look at me. I had gone about two hundred feet further when one of the men rode up to me on a bicycle, ~~and~~ He stopped to ask me for a match although I didn't know then what he was saying. I shook

my head and tried to walk on; but, when he asked me if I were not an American parachutist (in English), I stopped. He told me to follow him quickly and I was taken to a house where I joined Sgt DARCY (E & E REPORT No. 167). Later we were joined by Sgt ZEOLI and the rest of our journey was arranged.

Journey  
ARRANGED

SGT ZEOLI'S STORY UNTIL JOINING LT HARRIS:

After we were out of formation fighters attacked, in line, at 5 o'clock. There was a malfunction in my guns which was occupying all my time, and I didn't know how badly off we were until Sgt DARCY nudged me, and pointed to the burning number two engine. A flak burst knocked my gun out of my hands and when I got

GUN KNOCKED OUT  
OF HANDS BY FLAK

back to them there were several annoying 20 mm ~~shots~~ explosions. The ball-turret gunner was coming out of his turret. I called into my dead (I didn't know it then) 'mike' for help and asked why the ball-turret wasn't firing. When the ball-turret gunner started putting on his chute I looked around and saw Sgt DARCY fumbling with the waist door. In a few minutes Sgt CUCCARO and Sgt RAY were lined up behind him and it wasn't long after that before I was trying to get out by the waist window. I ~~happened to see~~ <sup>saw</sup> that the tail of our plane was shot off so I scrambled back there and ~~was~~ fell out just as the plane went into a dive.

TAIL OF PLANE  
SHOT OFF

I fell several thousand feet, saw two chutes above me, and, just to be on the safe side, pulled my ~~rip-cord~~ rip-cord. As soon as the chute opened I guessed I was around 6000 feet. An FW 190 was circling around near me and I thought I saw a burst from his guns; then I thought I heard rifle fire from the ground.

LANDS AMONG  
CROWD OF  
FRENCHMAN

I landed in a semi-conscious state with about eight Frenchmen standing over me yelling, "Deutsch," and pointing across the fields. I didn't pay much attention to them; besides, I knew we hadn't come down in Holland. A woman stuck several lumps of sugar in my mouth. I was trying to ~~take~~ get out of my harness and take off my flying pants when an aircraft buzzed me. The Frenchmen and I crawled into some weeds. There wasn't much cover in the weeds so I left my chute and flying pants and ran toward the village. I was in a field

two hundred yards southwest of <sup>the</sup> village. Along the north <sup>side</sup> edge of the village there was wood. ~~Between the road and the wood~~ A road which came out of the village cut me off from the wood but there were large haystacks on the other side of the road between the road and the wood. That was the only place I could see to hide. Our plane had crashed about thirty yards from the road in the same field I <sup>had landed</sup> in but it was not <sup>far</sup> between me and the road. A large number of people were gathering around the plane and I had to run in full sight of them. Before I got to the road someone yelled at me, and, looking around I saw a crew-member running in the same direction as I. He called me to wait and when I slowed <sup>down</sup> ~~to~~ he stopped to look at the plane. I yelled that I wasn't waiting for anybody and ran on to the haystacks.

CREW MEMBER STOPS TO WATCH BURNING PLANE

Behind one of the haystacks I took off my flying coveralls, boots and heated suit, and, shoved this stuff under the hay. The Aids Box and Purse went into my flying suit. When I was ready to leave I peered around the haystack but could not get a good view of the aircraft. There was a line of cars on the road near the plane so I knew 'Gerry' had arrived. I wasn't more than 75 yards from the road, and, as I left the haystack I heard a shout go up; there was some firing, too, but

SEEN BY GUARDS WHILE RUNNING TO HIDE

I don't know that it was ~~me~~ at me. Before I got into the wood I looked back <sup>again</sup> and saw several people, who looked like soldiers, running in my direction. I tried to give the impression that I was going into the wood with <sup>every</sup> ~~the~~ intantion of circling the village, but, as soon as I gained the cover of the wood I changed my direction entirely. After I had crashed through the wood for several miles I came onto a road and crossed it when I was sure no one was in sight. This took me through another wood - a small one - and I came out in open fields. I ran immediately to a farmer who was working alone in the field, and, when he saw me coming he motioned before I got there for me to run on into some bushes and hide.

MEETS FRIENDLY FARMER

He came over <sup>a few minutes later</sup> and gave me his jacket, and, seemed very glad to see me. ~~XXXX~~ Gautiously he led me back to the woods edge and hid me. I waited while he went for clothing; ~~and~~ he returned soon with clothes and two men. After I had <sup>changed</sup> ~~dropped~~ I was still in stockinged feet because they were having trouble getting shoes. We walked to a small village ~~that was about three miles from where I had parachuted and~~

where  
 I waited ~~in~~ <sup>in the thicket in</sup> a thicket, <sup>while</sup> they went once more to find shoes. They ~~were~~ back soon, triumphant, and, I was taken to a barn inside the village. We got out my maps and one of the Frenchman produced a French-English dictionary. I tried discussing with them the possibilities of getting back to England across the Channel or of going into Switzerland. The road to SPAIN looked ~~like~~ a long and ~~hard~~ <sup>hazardous</sup> journey <sup>which</sup> I wanted to avoid. ~~that~~ When I saw we weren't getting anywhere I asked them to find the Underground for me. They were puzzled and never did understand what I meant - I think, out of perversity.

Thinks for UNDERGROUND

I spent that night in the barn and the next morning one of the Frenchmen told me they would see what they could do ~~for~~ <sup>to help</sup> me. A note was brought - asking me who I was, did I need anything and would I like to join two of my companions. The answer was yes and the next night I was taken to Lt HARRIS ~~XXX~~ and Sgt DANCY. From there my Journey was arranged.

Journey ARRANGED

Capt White

W.A. Holt